



**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
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MEMORANDUM FOR DISTRIBUTION

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FROM: HQ USAF/A1

1040 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20330-1040

SUBJECT: Modification and Reissuance of Air Force Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Program Guidance in Response to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Reference: (a) Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff, Manpower, Personnel, and Services Memorandum, "Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Program and Travel Guidance in Response to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)", 27 March 2020 (hereby cancelled)
(b) Secretary of Defense Memorandum, "Delegation of the Authority to Waive the Requirement to Provide Military Funeral Honors During the National Emergency Concerning the Novel Coronavirus Disease Outbreak," 27 April 2020.
(c) Secretary of Defense Memorandum, "Transition to Conditions-based Phased Approach to Coronavirus Disease 2019 Personnel Movement and Travel Restrictions", 22 May 2020.
(d) Under Secretary of Defense Memorandum, "Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Travel Guidance," 5 May 2020.
(e) Department of Defense Instruction 1300.18, *Department of Defense (DoD) Personnel Casualty Matters, Policies, and Procedures*, 8 January 2008.
(f) Secretary of the Air Force Memorandum, "Air Force Support of Military Funeral Honors Travel During the National Emergency Concerning the Novel Coronavirus Disease Outbreak," 7 August 2020.
(g) Secretary of the Air Force Memorandum, "Travel Restriction Delegations of Authority," 11 May 2020.
(h) Air Force Instruction 34-501, *Mortuary Affairs*, 16 April 2019.
(i) Air Force Instruction 36-3002, *Casualty Services*, 20 June 2017.

Effective immediately, this memorandum cancels reference (a) and reissues Air Force Casualty and Mortuary guidance that will remain in effect until further notice. Department of the Air Force issues this document in accordance with the most current Office of the Secretary of Defense and departmental guidance as outlined in references (b) through (i).

We developed these emergency provisions based on Department of Defense (DoD) priorities for the COVID-19 response, State and local shelter-in-place orders, and the Office of Management Budget Guidance Memorandum M-20-16, "Federal Agency Operations Alignment to Slow the Spread of Coronavirus COVID19", 17 March 2020, in support of the population we serve as part of the casualty and mortuary programs. Their intention is to help:

- Protect all Service members, DoD civilian employees, contractors, and our family members.
- Safeguard our national security missions and capabilities.
- Support interagency efforts for a whole-of-government approach to combat the virus.

We anticipate resuming normal casualty and mortuary operations after authorities terminate this National Emergency.

1. Emergency Family Member Travel (Mission Essential Travel for Very Seriously Injured/Ill (VSI) and Non-Mission Essential Travel for Seriously Injured/Ill (SI) and Hostile Not Seriously Wounded/Injured).

Statute provides travel to the bedside for up to three family members for Airmen who become wounded, injured or ill, or hospitalized and the physician/Medical Treatment Facility Commander determines the member is Very Seriously Injured/Ill (VSI), Seriously Injured/Ill (SI) or Hostile Not-Seriously Injured/Ill (Hostile-NSI).

ACTIONS

- a. Bedside travel is limited to only those family members required to make decisions, and in the case of an Airman who is considered by medical authorities to be VSI or SI. Travel is only permitted within CONUS, Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico or other US Territories or OCONUS with a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Level 1 or Level 2 travel health notice and access to the medical facility is certified by the requesting physician and Medical Facility or Medical Group Commander on the AF Form 4455. VSI bedside travel will not be completed from, or to OCONUS, or to any local area, state or US Territory with a CDC Level 3 travel health notice.
- b. Bedside travel will be by exception for those who are Hostile-NSI until travel restrictions are lifted. The AFPC/CC or Executive Director may grant exceptions, limited to the geographic restrictions of paragraph 1.a., where adequate justification is provided and access to the medical facility is certified by the requesting physician and Medical Facility or Medical Group Commander on the Emergency Family Member Travel Worksheet (AF Form 4455).

2. Escort and Unit Representatives Escorting Remains of Service Members and Civilian Employees to Final Destination.

In accordance with reference (e), the military and military-contracted aircraft commanders are designated as the official escort for remains traveling from OCONUS to the mortuary at Dover Air Force Base. Uniformed military escorts are not required until the deceased are prepared by the CONUS Port Mortuary.

For CONUS deaths, escort and Family Assistance Representative government funded travel can only resume when specific conditions are met as outlined in reference (c).

Approval of an exception to policy for travel through restricted areas will be executed on a case-by-case basis, and the approval authority for such waivers lies with the first General Officer/Flag Officer (GO/FO), Senior Executive Service (SES) or equivalent in the traveler's chain of command, see reference (g).

ACTIONS

- a. OCONUS escorts from place of death to Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations (AFMAO) at Dover Air Force Base, DE will be the military or military-contracted aircraft commander.
- b. If a family requests a military escort and/or a Family Assistance Representative (FAR) travel to them, the escort or representative must travel with an approved exception to policy as outlined above. The Mortuary Officer will route all exception to policy requests through the traveler's chain of command to the first GO/FO or SES official for approval or disapproval.
- c. If approved, the Mortuary Officer must ensure the Squadron Commander of the military escort is aware of the quarantine guidelines for each state through which the escort will travel. The Mortuary Officer and the Squadron Commander must ensure the military escort adheres to those guidelines in coordination with the Installation Public Health, upon return to home station.
- d. AFMAO must be notified of all requested exceptions to policy regardless of approval.
- e. Shelter of remains will be funded under primary mortuary entitlements at the Government's expense until further notice. Families may elect to wait to transport or inter their loved one until the national emergency is over or until additional guidance is provided

3. Dignified Transfer (DT) Travel (Non-Mission Essential Travel).

Air Force will continue to invite family members to Dover Air Force Base, DE to witness the Dignified Transfer of their Fallen. Consistent with actions in response to COVID-19, we have modified Dignified Transfer actions to keep family members, the teams assigned at Dover Air Force Base, Distinguished Visitors, and other individuals as safe as possible while executing dignified transfers with dignity, honor and respect.

ACTIONS

- a. Family: Family member attendance is temporarily limited to immediate family members plus two personnel, unless the Director, Air Force Services (AF/AIS) grants a waiver request from the Primary Next Of Kin.
- b. Media: All three (3) Dignified Transfer media options, per reference (i), paragraph 2.38., will still be offered to the Primary Next of Kin. Implementation of each option is outlined below:
 - i. Public Media: AFMAO Public Affairs will record the Dignified Transfer and create video and photos to be loaded to DVDS and distributed to public media outlets.

- ii. **Internal Media:** AFMAO Public Affairs will record the Dignified Transfer and provide a DVD copy to families.
- iii. **No Media:** There will be no media coverage of the DT.
- c. **Carry Teams:** For Air Force, we will use the Air Force carry teams at Dover AFB in lieu of having Air Force Honor Guard carry teams travelling to Dover.
- d. **Unit Members:** Unit member attendance is temporarily limited to the Commander and a Senior Enlisted member, who must be health screened prior to travel. If either of these members are unable to attend, we authorize a substitute.
- e. **DVs:**
 - i. **Officiating Officer:** A GO is still required to attend the Dignified Transfer for this role. If a GO/FO is not available to attend, the AFMAO/CC will serve as the Officiating Officer.
 - ii. **Other DVs.** In light of the national emergency, DVs should limit their attendance consistent with safety precautions.

4. Casualty Notifications (Mission Essential Travel) and Casualty/Mortuary Assistance to Survivors (Non-Mission Essential Travel).

Statutory authorities provide for the Secretary of the Air Force to fund necessary expenses associated with the notification of the Next-of-Kin (NOK) when an Airman becomes a casualty. DoD and AF Policy stipulates how NOK notifications will be conducted. DoD and AF policy requires casualty and mortuary assistance to be delivered to recipients of benefits/entitlements and to the Person Authorized to Direct Disposition.

Additionally, reference (i) requires Casualty Assistance Representatives to deliver assistance to those designated or eligible recipients of Casualty Benefits and Entitlements. Reference (i) requires Mortuary Officers and Family Assistance Representatives to deliver assistance to the Person Authorized to Direct Disposition and eligible recipients of Mortuary Benefits and Entitlements.

ACTIONS

- a. In-person notifications will continue within CONUS, Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico or other US Territories and OCONUS CDC/Department of State Level 1 or Level 2 travel health notice locations and where permissible in accordance with state/local restrictions. To limit force exposure, the notification team will consist of no more than two military members (the required field grade notification officer, and one member to accompany that officer). Where in-person notifications cannot be made in Level 1 or Level 2 travel health notice locations, telephonic notification will be executed to avoid delaying NOK knowing the fate of their loved ones. Personnel executing in-person notifications will complete the COVID-19 questionnaire to protect the health/welfare of survivors being notified. All notification in Level 3 locations will be made via telephone by the fallen Airman's Commander.

- b. Notification Team Members must wear facemasks when required by state/local restrictions or CDC prescribed social distancing measures cannot be maintained. When either condition exists, the wear of masks is applicable for travel to and from the notification, as well as within the residence while notifications take place.
- c. The Air Force will provide the casualty and mortuary entitlements briefing to the eligible/designated recipients and Person Authorized to Direct Disposition of remains in-person where permissible in accordance with state/local restrictions and local leadership guidance. For all other locations, briefings will be conducted remotely until restrictions are lifted. Casualty Assistance Representatives, mortuary officers, and mortuary technicians can accomplish document exchange via authorized technology platforms, email or a national courier service.

5. Past Conflict Coincidental (COIN) Travel/Missing Persons Reintegration NOK Travel (Mission Essential Travel).

Statute provides for NOK travel to attend annual briefings and receive information in the government's latest efforts to investigate, excavate, recover and identify unaccounted-for Airmen from our Nations Past Conflicts.

Statute also provides for next of kin travel to the reintegration location of Airmen who are captured or detained and returned to U.S. control.

ACTIONS

- a. COIN: Extend NOK travel if the National League of POW/MIA Families and Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency host the annual government briefings to survivors of unaccounted-for Airmen from past conflicts in Korea, Southeast Asia and Cold War era.
- b. Reintegration: Travel only within CONUS, Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico or other US Territories with a CDC Level 1 or Level 2 travel health notice and/or where NOK access to the medical facility is certified by the requesting physician and Medical Facility or Medical Group Commander, if required.

6. Family Travel for Funerals and Installation and Unit Memorials (Non-Essential Mission Travel).

The Air Force is authorized to provide travel and transportation allowance to eligible family members to attend one installation or unit memorial service within 24-months from the death of their family member.

ACTIONS

- a. For installations located in states which do not have mass gathering and travel restrictions, Installation Commanders are the approval authority for hosting an installation or unit memorial for a recently deceased member. The following guidance applies to funerals and memorial services:

- If a family resides in the local area of the installation or in areas without travel restrictions, travel coordination and reimbursement will be conducted as usual with the mortuary team.
 - If a family resides in a state where restrictions have not been lifted, they are discouraged from traveling to installation or unit memorials. If families decide to travel despite restrictions those individuals will coordinate and pay for their own travel upfront and must also follow the quarantine guidelines for the state they live in and the state they are traveling to. The local mortuary team will contact AFMAO for assistance with reimbursing the family at a later date as they are still eligible to receive those travel entitlements.
- b. If events are not postponed in states where mass gathering and travel restrictions are still in place, and a family travels to one or both events, the family will coordinate and pay for their own travel upfront.

7. Military Funeral Honors (Mission Essential Travel).

Pursuant to Section 1491 of Title 10 U.S.C., military funeral honors shall be provided upon request for the funeral of any veteran (to include members who die on Active Duty and Retirees), except when military honors are prohibited.

Installation Commanders are encouraged to provide funeral honors when local legal and health conditions allow, see reference (f).

ACTIONS

- a. Installation leaders and Force Support Squadron representatives will work with families and local funeral directors to request postponement of military funeral honors until after the COVID-19 National Emergency.
- b. If families decline to postpone or defer requests for the rendering of military funeral honors despite travel restrictions, installation leaders may provide support at their discretion. Where possible, installations may support with a two- to seven-person detail for veterans and retirees and up to a twenty-person detail for active duty members funeral honors. Installation Honor Guard teams must follow state and local guidelines when providing a larger detail as many states have issued explicit guidelines including no more than 10 individuals present at a funeral. Appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and physical distancing guidelines must be followed.

Installations supporting military funeral honors will ensure Honor Guard participants wear protective masks at all times, as physical distancing cannot be maintained during the U.S. Flag presentation and the offering of condolences to the designated representative. Only the Honor Guard member serving as the bugler will remove their protective mask during the playing of Taps, but must ensure the required physical distancing measures are maintained. Once Taps is played, the Honor Guard member will place the mask back on their face prior to forward movement. Honor Guards will follow two-person military funeral honors sequencing guidance provided in the Base Honor Guard Manual.

My points of contact for this memorandum are Col Brian Eddy, Air Force Mortuary Operation Commander, (302) 677-2920, Mr. Todd Rose, Air Force Personnel Center, Chief of Casualty Affairs, (210) 860-6111 and Ms. Ashley Jackson, Air Force Warrior and Survivor Care Branch, (703) 692-4522.

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